

Granular.ai

Customer discovery - session
case study

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- comments Siddarth.

In the complicated reality of the startup ecosystem, the information that one is working on a wrong product for the wrong audience and has little chance to succeed can be highly useful. This is exactly how Granular.ai was able to mitigate potential serious business risks and discover new ways to approach clients by attending a product discovery session launched by Tooploox specialists.



The client

Granular.ai is a Techstars-backed satellite imagery analytics startup that operates on the steel processing market. The company uses Artificial Intelligence to track changes occurring near the steel production facilities to provide clients with up-to-date and precise information about the market situation, including more obscure data like the production on the Chinese market or recycled steel usage monitoring.

The company was backed by over **\$220k with NGA Investors and Boston Techstars** being the latest institutions to support the company.

“Actually, it was not our original idea to use the technology we ended up working with. The initial vision of the company was built upon a vastly different vision of the market, target group, and the needs of our clients”

- says Siddharth Gupta, CEO, and founder of Granular.ai



The challenge



Advancing in the fast-moving market has always been the bread-and-butter of startups, with Granular.ai being no exception. Yet every company needs a defined vision of the product to develop and build upon.

“We were thinking about a platform that reduces the uncertainty of processing facilities regarding the supply of the iron ore; it was our client’s pain point which we wished to solve with our platform. With that in mind, we delivered dashboards providing them with information we found useful and delivered our machine learning algorithms to scrap this data from satellite imagery” says Siddharth Gupta.

The idea was promising, so Techstars Boston chose Granular.ai to be supported by Tooploox’s product discovery team. The goal was to harness the power of a customer discovery session to choose the most promising customer segment as well as validate if the problem that Granular.ai wants to solve actually exists for their end users

“Initially we thought the meeting will be UX-centered, as we are aware of how much good user experience affects performance. The deeper and more business-centric [insight] was a surprise for us, as well as great enlightenment”

- comments Siddharth Gupta.



Our work



“The program we prepared for Techstars Boston was reaching far beyond the user experience” comments Izabela Piotrowska, Senior Product Manager at Tooploox.

“The key goal of product discovery is to reduce the uncertainty regarding the business (viability), the technology (feasibility) and the customer (desirability) In this particular case we’ve focused on desirability, so the question: do you have evidence that customers from a chosen segment have the problem you’re trying to fix with your solution?”

The broad perspective

“The initial challenge we encounter as a business owner is a problem with a broader perspective. We had a vision, a passion, and the idea for a product. But in fact, it is not that easy to unchain ourselves from day-to-day operations and get the external perspective on what we are actually doing”

- comments Siddarth Gupta.

The Tooploox team designed and facilitated a remote workshop to validate and verify Siddarth’s vision and the needs of his prospective customers. “We chose a customer segment that the Granular.ai team prioritized to validate first. We then introduced the team to Assumption Mapping, Test Cards and Learning Cards, tools popularized by David J. Bland and Alex Osterwalder in Testing Business Ideas. We wanted to show them an example on how to validate assumptions and how to look for evidence. The format several techniques to prepare the workshop to be time-effective and deliver desired results. says Izabela Piotrowska. “These tools are great and combining them in a proper way can deliver tremendous results.”

Granular.ai’s team already had a clarified product and a vision of their clients. Thus, the product discovery session launched by the Tooploox team enabled the company to mitigate the risks regarding the product-client fit.

The workshop was delivered in a fully digital environment, using tools like Miro board and Zoom, to ensure safety in the COVID-19 era.



The discovery

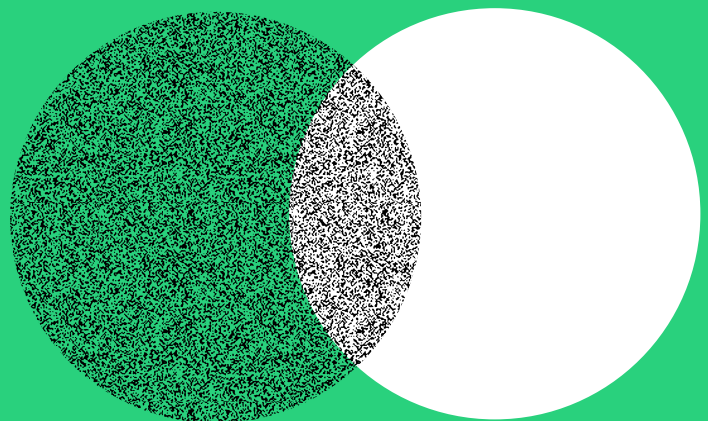
The workshop was also a way to discover and validate Granular.ai's assumptions and hypotheses regarding their clients and the market.

“Our initial thought was that the lack of information regarding the iron ore supply was the main factor creating volatility in the market. We have built the prototypes based on this vision and were looking for a market fit” - recalls Siddarth Gupta.

To validate these ideas, the Tooploox team has organized a meeting with a market expert and collaborated with Granular.ai's team on the set of questions to ask.

“It was an enlightenment. We asked the right questions and dug deeper on what we have to test” says Siddarth Gupta. We had a four-hour session where we developed questions” he adds.

“The right question is the only way to get the answer we need. We had to make our expert talk about the real struggles for the business, not to confirm or deny our intuitions. If we asked directly about this or that challenge, the answer would probably be “yes”. But it would be an induced “yes”, coming from the context of the conversation, rather than the real, day-to-day work in a particular industry” comments Izabela Piotrowska.



“It was the crucial information we were looking for” recalls Siddarth “Is the uncertainty regarding the supply of the ore really a bottleneck of the market? Is there a high uncertainty regarding the supply of iron ore, so we can transform the market with our innovative idea? And the answer to that was >NO<” he adds. “That was the point when we realized that we are tracking the wrong things. We are building a product that nobody needs”

The session proved that the real volatility was created on the demand side, where the steel mills were unable to directly predict how much steel will be required in the longer term. The challenge was reinforced by the unpredictable supply coming from the Asian markets and recycled steel from scrap yards, which adds yet another erratic element to the image.

“Meeting with the market expert appeared to be the most effective way to validate our ideas in this particular case. When faced with the expert and the right questions to ask, the Granular.ai’s team was able to rediscover their product, look at it from a different perspective and rethink their model”

- comments Izabela Piotrowska.

Armed with the right questions to ask and a framework to come up to validate their ideas, the team has conducted additional research and interviews with market experts. The outcome was clear.

“We had to reorient ourselves, retrain the models, and rethink the business model. I feel deep relief and excitement when I think about it now. We saved so much money, so much work, and avoided so many bitter disappointments that would come with selling the product that the market is not interested in” comments Siddarth. “And we did it. We pivoted, coded, and worked hard to be in the place we are today, having a product our clients love and investors acclaim”



The effect

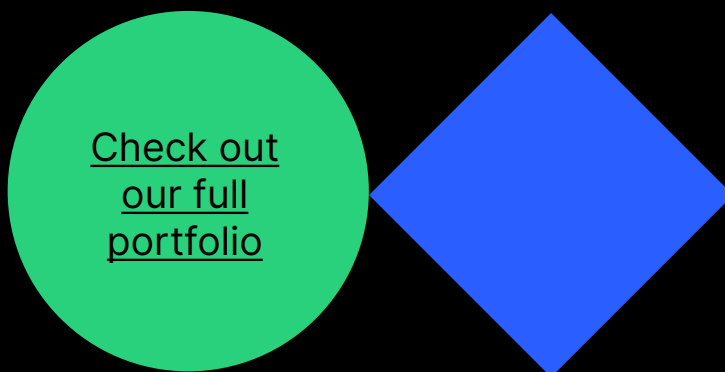
“The key element of the cooperation with our product discovery team is, in fact, a self discovery” comments Izabela Piotrowska.

“We gave Granular.ai the right tools and they used them wisely. Of course, the credit also goes to the Granular.ai team. It’s not so common that founders are able to fully embrace the feedback from the market research and detach from their original idea. I believe Granular.ai’s mindset is their biggest asset.”

“It was a discovery indeed” confirms Siddarth Gupta. “We have come up with a new engineering roadmap. We changed which problems to approach and the needs to address with the market. Luckily we are on a product development stage, so it was a manageable revolution rather than a complete bedlam”

After the pivot, Granular.ai has come with a new framework for gathering feedback and testing hypotheses among users and prospects.

“We changed the way we talk to our clients. We used to approach everyone and tell them about our product. Now we are asking about their needs and checking what we can do for them. But it would be impossible without Tooploox’s specialists who helped us discover that we approach the market with the wrong product. And was it bad news? Totally not! We saved so many hours of hard work, so much money by understanding this fact. If that’s not good news, I have no idea what can be!”



Whether you need a full product, consultation, product discovery or a tech partner, our experts will help you find the best solutions.



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